

Publicly Accessible Open Space

Task 1: Update the definition of “Publicly Accessible Open Space”

Provide a recommendation for updating and clarifying the definition of what types of publicly accessible open space (use, type, function, and extent of public accessibility) “counts” toward the City’s public open space goals. This would provide guidance on easement language (how much and what forms of public access must be provided for it to count) and future policy changes.

Definition

The City of Alexandria has a wide variety of publicly accessible open spaces within its City limits. These areas include sports fields and courts, trails, conservation areas, playspaces, and forested land. As a result, the City has crafted a definition that is intended to be broad enough to capture the wide diversity of uses that fall within the definition of publicly accessible open space. The specific typologies of publicly accessible open space can be found below.

Wordsmith

Publicly Accessible Open Space in the City of Alexandria is:

Outdoor space that has guaranteed public access with the primary purpose being formal or informal recreation; or the conservation and protection of natural, cultural, or historic resources; or which enhances the health and well-being of Alexandria.

1. Purpose

The purpose and function of publicly accessible open space is to provide public spaces for human interaction and outdoor enjoyment in the urban context.

Wordsmith/pick one

- a. Public open space is intended to promote an appropriate balance between the built environment, public parks and other open spaces intended for respite from urban development, and to protect natural features and preserve the character of the City. (Rockville)
- b. The City finds that public parks and common open space controls congestion; promotes health and the general welfare; provides adequate light and air; promotes the conservation of natural resources and natural hazard areas; prevents environmental pollution; avoids undue concentration of population; and facilitates the adequate provision of recreation and parks. (City of Frederick)
- c. Publicly Accessible Open Space serves to increase the City’s diverse types of open spaces; to protect and enhance its cultural history; to conserve its natural resources; and to create vibrant and useable spaces; in order to support a more healthy, livable, and sustainable City.
- d. To ensure a system of publicly accessible open space that equitably responds to the City’s recreational and natural resource needs while efficiently utilizing available resources

2. Goals

Wordsmith the goal statement

Ideally, urban areas will contain a complement of publicly accessible open space types in order to serve local leisure needs; support revitalization goals; support environmental and sustainability goals; and contribute to the areas' sense of culture, liveliness, and identity. It is also important to pursue creative solutions to providing open space and recreation facilities in these areas. It is impossible for all publicly accessible open space to meet all the City's goals for publicly accessible open space. However, it is the City's goal that collectively, publicly open space

Add or change goals (please keep in mind we want a City-wide view, not an individual park view)

- a. Be a meaningful place to the community
- b. Be multi-functional and adaptable
- c. Provide diversity and inclusion
- d. Encourage social interaction
- e. Promote health and well being
- f. Provide equity and accessibility
- g. Embody environmental sustainability

3. Characteristics

Publicly accessible open space, may be privately or publicly owned and managed; can be accessed by any member of the public directly from the public realm without a need for membership, keys, codes, or access cards. Ideally, these spaces should be visible from the public realm and provided at grade for the greatest degree of accessibility.

Commented [AV1]: system look vs park specific

Wordsmith/edit characteristics (we would like to add metrics to this as part of Task 2)

- a. Accessible
 - i. Access into the publicly accessible open space is generally unimpeded and/or has ease of physical entry to encourage use (physical access)
 - ii. Publicly accessible open space must be with few exceptions available for use and enjoyment by the general public in perpetuity (time)
 - iii. Accessibility may afford scenic views for public enjoyment
- b. Provides a balance between the built and natural environment
 - i. Open spaces shall be designed to provide relief from urban development through natural features or recreational opportunities.
- c. Useable
 - i. Allows for flexible uses/diversity of use
 - ii. May have accessory structures to support its intended function (i.e.. amphitheater, restrooms, boardwalk, picnic shelter)
 - iii. May have potable water, electrical power, plumbing to support recreation activities

d. Context appropriate design

- i. Meets community needs and context. Design options should respond to changes in community needs and in recreation trends
- ii. Context appropriate (aesthetics of surroundings, demographic composition)

e. Equitably meets community needs for recreation, social, and cultural activities

4. Extent of public accessibility

Staff Observation/Note:

As part of Task 1, the extent of public accessibility is to be identified and defined. While we have not discussed it specifically, some themes have arisen from our discussions that can be used as the starting point for defining the extent of public accessibility for publicly accessible open space.

Privatization of open space - at what point does it begin to feel private and not publicly accessible open space? If you have items you would like to include please do so.

- a. Sense of community?
- b. Sense of belonging and openness?

5. Open Space Protection Measures

In 2002, it was recognized through the Open Space Master Plan that the City's publicly accessible open space is a finite resource that must be protected and conserved for future generations. The main strategies and policies for protection include:

- a. Public ownership; owned by a government or other public body.
- b. Land use zoning; the City's Zoning Ordinance includes Public Open Space (POS) zoning, intended for protection, conservation, and recreational uses of public land
- c. Public access easements on private property legally guaranteeing public access and usage
- d. Conservation easements on private (or public?) property legally restricting development of land. The easement may include clauses allowing the public to use and access the property.
- e. Resource Protection Area (RPA) – RPAs are sensitive environmental corridors that should be preserved in a natural condition. The City's Stormwater Ordinance restricts development that can occur within RPA's
- f. Land Use grants such as the Land, Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and other agreements, that conserve land in perpetuity
- g. Other strategies include local capital investments and sustainable management to protect resources and to extend the useful life of facilities.

Staff Observations/Notes:

As noted in Open Space Policy Plan scope of work, guidance is recommended to clarify the parameters and extents of public access easements (what is the language, form of access, how is this communicated to the public?)

6. What is not counted as Publicly Accessible Open Space?

Staff Notes:

As part of creating a definition and set of metrics for what counts as publicly accessible open space, staff thought it would be important to include areas and things that were discussed that do not count towards open space. By including what does not count, staff hopes to create a clearer picture for what is publicly accessible open space and how to count and characterize it.

Edit/Add to list

- a. Bodies of water
- b. Roadways
- c. More than 50% of parking lots and other accessory uses
- d. Parking lot islands
- e. Enclosed structures
- f. Sidewalks by themselves (i.e. along roads)? (currently not counted towards Open Space Master Plan acreage)

7. Open Space Typologies

The following typologies have been developed in the Open Space Master Plan for publicly accessible open space and are the types of spaces that are calculated into the Open Space Master Plan acreage goals. The typologies primarily identify City owned land--parks, natural resource areas, linear corridors/trails, shared use facilities such as schools, and other City owned destination sites. The regional classification pertains to public sites managed by other entities, such as the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority or National Park Service, to serve populations greater than the City limits.

Staff Observations/Notes:

- This classification system appears limited to publicly owned sites.
- Open space on private property with public access easements are not specifically addressed
- Should this classification be expanded or modified to include public access easements?
- Should access easements be classified?
- Are there other open space types and features such as “informal and formal recreation”, “playgrounds, plazas, cemeteries, courts fitness areas, etc.... that warrant its own classification systems? (i.e. Montgomery County table)
- The classification system is intended to contribute to the City’s total acreage of protected publicly accessible open space. It also is factored into the City’s current open space acreage goals and metrics (7.3 acres per 1,000 residents)

Commented [AV2]: Do we want to make changes to the City’s current open space typologies? Are there any additions or deletions needed? Is so, please include.

Do we want to make changes to the City’s current open space typologies? Are there any additions or deletions needed? Is so, please include.

| Classification | Description | Size | Service |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Citywide | Contains multiple uses within park boundary including: attracts visitors from all over the City Example: Chinquapin Park | 15-20 acres | 0-25 miles from users |
| Neighborhood | May include multiple uses within park boundary; attracts nearby residents Example: Beverley Park | 20,000 sq. ft. to 5 acres | 0-5 miles from users |
| Pocket Park | Small open space; mainly single use attracting nearby residents Example: Sunset Mini Park | Under 20,000 sq. ft. | .25-0.5 mile or less from users |
| Natural Resource Areas | Includes open spaces that are primarily passive-use or preservation areas Example: Clermont Natural Park | No Minimum or Maximum | Citywide |

| Classification | Description | Size | Service |
|---|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Shared Use | Includes parks that share facilities with schools and recreation centers Example: Patrick Henry Field | 5-20 acres (average) | 0-25 miles from users |
| Destination/ Historical | Attracts users from beyond the region, typically because of particularly unique features Example: Fort Ward Park, Waterfront Park System | Varies | 0-100 or more miles |
| Regional | Includes lands or facilities administered by other regional entities Example: Cameron Run Regional Park | 50-75 acres | 0-100 miles from users |
| Corridors/ Linear Parks/ Trailways | Includes trailways, corridors and linear parks that serve primarily as linear bikeway corridors, may include ROWs Example: Metro Linear Park | No Minimum or Maximum | 0-100 miles from users |